

NARRATIVE SERIES.

## A NEW WORLD;

OR,

THE HISTORY OF GEORGE MEDWAY,

AN OLD PLOUGHMAN.



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## A NEW WORLD.

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GEORGE MEDWAY was born in a small cottage near a village in Shropshire. In this village there was no sabbath-school for the instruction of the young, nor any benevolent society to afford relief to the sick and the aged ; and, alas ! the people were living quietly together in a state of spiritual death,

“ Without one cheerful beam of hope,  
Or spark of glimmering day.”

He was a ploughman, and lived there for upwards of seventy years. When a young man, he was noted amongst his fellows for his great strength, his fleetness in running, his skill in all the sports of the village, and equally noted for his profaneness and habits of intemperance. He married about the age of twenty-five, and had three children : one died when an infant, another was a cripple, and the third, when a youth, went to reside at a manufacturing town, taking with him some of the worst principles and habits of his father.

George Medway, though a very depraved man, and as ignorant of the religion of the Bible as though he had been born in the wilds of America, was an honest servant, and laboured on the same farm, though under different masters, from the time he was able to ring a bell to frighten the birds from the ripening corn, till he completed his seventy-first year. His habits at home, in course of time, became very orderly ; he went to and from his labour very punctually. On the sabbath he spent the morning at home, and in the evening he constantly visited the Hare and Hounds, to take his pipe and tankard of ale, often boasting that he had not missed one night for upwards of half a century.

At length, having buried his wife, and become too weak to follow the plough, and being unable to get a lighter place of work, he took his crippled child to the union workhouse, and removed to spend the few remaining years of his life with his son, who kept a public-house. At first, having free use of the ale, he became intemperate, till his son very prudently fixed the quantity, and even this less amount of beer greatly deadened the power

of his mind, which had never seemed very strong, and he now became, to all appearance, very dull and stupid. Thus passing from the quiet of a village where he knew every face, to the hurry and bustle of a large town where he knew no one, he often wandered about alone, gazing around him seemingly with entire indifference.

One day when thus wandering, he turned into a little pathway leading to a garden, and at the end of this pathway he saw a cottage, and at the door of the cottage stood its inmate, a very godly and zealous disciple of Christ, who seeing a stranger, and that stranger an old man like himself, invited him to walk in and take a seat. He did so; and being now surrounded by shrubs and trees, which hid the great town from his view, he began talking of country employments and the scenes of his early days. John Dean, the master of the cottage, gave full leave to the tongue of his visitor, supposing that when he had gone to the length of his tether, he would become quiet, and then an opportunity would occur to speak on other and more important subjects. As Dean expected, so it came to pass; and he found the old man not only very ignorant of the facts and doctrines of the Bible, but apparently without the power of understanding them when presented in the simplest form, or even of listening with any degree of fixed attention to the statements and explanations which were given. The only remark he made was, after an account of the crucifixion of the Son of God: "Methinks it was too bad to serve him so; they wouldn't do so in Shropshire."

As he was leaving the cottage, Dean said to him, "You had better come some evening and take a pipe with me, and then we can have a good long chat." This invitation was given because he knew there was a power connected with the truth as it is in Jesus, which, by the help of the Holy Spirit, could open this contracted mind, and give feeling to this hard heart. He also knew that this Spirit sometimes employs a feeble instrument in his work. "We must pray to the Lord for the poor old man," said Dean to his godly wife, after he had left, "and who can tell but our prayer may prevail, and we may see him a new creature in Christ Jesus?" "The Lord grant it," she replied, "for it does seem as if nothing could change him. But the Lord Jesus Christ can subdue all things to himself."

The next evening Medway came in his best coat, sat down, took his pipe, and talked away at a great rate about the doings and events of his past life; but after a while having got through his very scanty store of knowledge, he sat in silence, a dull and stupid listener, as it seemed, to all that was said to him about Jesus Christ and the great salvation. Many efforts were made by Dean and his wife to make him feel that he was a sinner who needed a Saviour; but they appeared to have not the least effect. Still, though depressed, they did not despair, as they knew that the Divine Spirit, who regenerates the soul, can open and strengthen the dullest mind to understand the truth, and can enable the hardest heart to feel its power to purify and console.

At parting, Dean said to him, "I wish you would come next Sunday morning and go with me," which he engaged to do, thinking it was to take a walk into the country. He was punctual at the hour; and after resting a little, they took their staves in their hands and set off. As they were walking up the pathway leading from the cottage, Dean said in reply to a question, "I am not going into the country, but to a church, and I suppose you will have no objection to go with me."

"Why, as for that, I shan't tell what to do, for I never go'ed to one but when I was married, near fifty years agone last Easter Sunday."

"You will have nothing to do but sit still and hold your tongue, and just hearken to what the minister says."

"Part of that, methinks, is easy enough, as I shall soon be off to sleep, if I be to sit still and do nothing."

As I had to administer the Lord's supper, I preached, as my custom was on such occasions, on the design of the death of Christ, and on the obligation of commemorating it. Now and then, during the sermon, my eyes turned towards the pew in which Medway was sitting; and I was more than once struck with the singularity of his attitude and appearance. He sat almost motionless, with his hands holding the little book-shelf in the inside front of the pew, and his mouth open, gazing at me with a fixed and intent look. When this part of the service was over, many of the congregation withdrew, leaving the communicants to engage in the solemn act of conunemorating the great event of the death of the Son of God in behalf of sinful

men. On coming from the pulpit, I saw a slight confusion in the pew in which Medway was sitting, which somewhat startled me, as I did not know the cause of it ; but I found afterwards that it was caused by his positively refusing to go away with those who were leaving. His first remark rather astonished his friend Dean, especially as he uttered it in a very firm and rather loud tone—“ I am in a new world ; and I shan’t go till you go ; and I shall do as you do ! ” What to do John Dean did not know, as he was unwilling to let him remain, and equally unwilling to force him away ; but at length he resolved to leave him to act for himself.

Medway now resumed his seat, and sat quietly. His countenance seemed to become more intelligent and his features less stern and stupid ; there was even an appearance of feeling on them, and his eye seemed moistened. He took the bread, and ate it ; and he took the wine also, and drank it : many eyes were directed towards him. When the plate was handed to the pew, for the offerings of the church in behalf of its poor members, without any hint from his friend he put in his penny—all that he had—along with the other contributors. On going away, he walked some distance without speaking. At length he broke silence by repeating his first startling utterance: “ I be in a new world ; yes, I be in a new world.” This he repeated again and again as they passed along to their home, apparently insensible to every question or remark which his friend uttered.

On entering his son’s house he excited no small degree of alarm, by saying to his son, and some of the neighbours who were sitting in the tap room, “ I have been and heard a man who has taken me into a new world ; you must all go with me and Mr. Dean to night. It is a main wonderful world.” He called on his friend Dean in the early part of the afternoon, and took tea with him, and then went with him to the evening service. The text was taken from Luke xv. 2 : “ This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” I saw him as I read the text, and his eye told the tale of what was passing within. The words arrested his attention, and he continued to listen with evident feeling to all that was said, and particularly to some remarks to the following effect. Jesus Christ is able and willing to save the chief of sinners, such as have gone even to the greatest length

of wickedness. In proof of the truth of this, look at the facts of this history, which will tell what he has done. There is Zaccheus, who grew rich by oppression and extortion ; there is the dying thief ; there are the sinners of Jerusalem, who imbrued their hands in the blood of Christ, and who mocked and insulted him when in the agonies of death ; there is Saul of Tarsus, the chief persecutor of his age ; and there are some of the citizens of Corinth, who were guilty of the most shocking crimes. Perhaps there were not any greater sinners on the face of the earth ; yet they were forgiven, and renewed, and sanctified, and saved. And Jesus Christ is the same now as when he saved these men from their iniquity and from eternal woe : the same in power, and the same in compassion, and in his disposition towards fallen man. And are not some present living witnesses of the truth of this assertion ? Have you not gone with the multitude doing evil, surpassing many in the number and greatness of your sins ? Do you not even now tremble when you look back on the precipice on which you once stood careless and indifferent ? Can you retrace your history without being stung with remorse, and overpowered with shame and contrition ? Is any language too strong to describe your guilt and your depravity ? Will you not own that you have been the chief of sinners ; and yet through the exceeding riches of Divine grace you have been saved, even as others ?”

Having expressed an earnest desire to speak to me, Medway came to me one evening, preceded by his friend Dean. I at once recognised him, and rose, offering him my hand. For a few moments there was obvious embarrassment, which I endeavoured to relieve, but still he was embarrassed ; he looked on me with great benignity of expression, and his eyes showed the deep feeling of his soul at this crisis in its history ; but he remained silent, the power of utterance was suspended. I spoke so as to encourage him, adverting to the scenes of his early life which I had heard of before ; and he very soon recovered himself, and said, in a firm tone, “ I am now, sir, in a new world. I’ll tell you what I mean. I know I am in the old world ; but what you said on Sunday has put my heart into a new world, and my heart sees wonderful things.”

I knew his meaning, and answered him in the same form of expression which he had used.

“And what have you seen in this new world?”

“I see I am a great sinner. I have lived near seventy years, and have been all along sinning against God, and didn’t know it till Sunday.”

“What sins have you committed?”

“A power of sins. I’ve been a great sinner. Why, sir, I didn’t love God, nor fear him. I didn’t know nothing about him till Sunday morning.”

“What else have you seen in the new world?”

“I have seen Jesus Christ. Oh, how kind to come down from heaven, and die for us! This is new to me—it is wonderful!”

“What made you stay and take the bread and the wine on Sunday morning?”

“Why, sir, you said all should do it who loved Jesus Christ. I felt I loved him. Yes, my heart told me so. It has been telling me so ever since. It tells me so now. I can’t speak his name but I feel I love him. I can’t think about any thing else very well. If I think of any thing else, my heart gets dull and cold; but when I think about Jesus Christ, it gets young again.”

“But why do you love Jesus Christ?”

“Because he com’d down from heaven, and died on the cross. I don’t know how to make out very well what I mean. But I think Jesus will save me. This makes me love him. I feel a great change here,” putting his hand over his heart. “I can’t tell it, but it is something real.”

“Are you quite sure that you feel your heart really changed?”

“Why, if there be no change in my heart, where do my fresh thoughts and feelings come from? I never had none such till Sunday morning. I don’t know much now; but I would’nt be again such a poor old ignorant sinner as I was before Sunday morning for all the lands and houses in our village, or all the parish.”

“I hope your change is real, and that it will prove a lasting change.”

“I hope so: I should cry a power of tears if I thought I should be changed back again. The Lord save me from that.”

“Then you must thank him for making this great change in you, and pray to him to make the change a lasting one.”

“I do. I’m sure I do. I cried hundreds of tears last

night when I was in bed, and they be such tears as I never cried before. Tears of heart-sorrow, and heart-gladness."

" You hope to be saved?"

" I do, and am main thankful for it."

" But how do you expect to be saved?"

" Why, just how you told on Sunday morning. By Christ, and by nothing else. I should not like another Saviour, because he was so good as to die for us. How wonderful! I never heard anything like it before. I wish I had heard that blessed sermon fifty years agone."

I was much pleased with the artless and guileless simplicity of the old man, who, though unable fully to describe in language the great change through which he had evidently passed—from a state of spiritual death to newness of life—said enough to satisfy me, that he was become a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Such was his attachment to public worship, that he allowed neither the heat of summer nor the frost or snows of winter to prevent his regular and punctual attendance. But it was when singing the praises of the Lord that he was most powerfully excited, having a natural love for music, and a strong melodious voice, not much injured by age. No language can do justice to his appearance when thus engaged, especially on one occasion when the congregation was singing the following verse of a favourite hymn :

" Lo, the great High Priest ascended,  
Pleads the merit of his blood ;  
Venture on him, venture wholly,  
Let no other trust intrude ;  
None but Jesus  
Can do helpless sinners good."

He stood erect, with his hands resting on the pew, and his eyes closed, yet allowing the tears to steal silently out and trickle quietly down his deep-furrowed cheek ; and when he last stanza of the verse,

" None but Jesus  
Can do helpless sinners good,"

was repeated in full chorus, he caught the inspiration of the blessed fact, his countenance showing by its expression his deep feeling as he raised and joined his loud notes with those of the congregation.

I was prevented from having any conversation with him for many months ; when, feeling anxious to learn what

progress he had made in knowledge and in grace, I met him by appointment at John Dean's cottage. He was still the same man as when I first saw him, but he looked, I might almost say, younger ; his voice was firmer, his eyes brighter, and he was now able to converse with an ease which surprised me.

I said to him, "I suppose you would not like to go back to your native village and live as you used to do?"

"Why, sir, methinks no happy spirit would like to come out of heaven to live on earth again."

"Do you often think of how you used to live?"

"I think of it with sadness and horror. But I know'd no better then. What a mercy that I was not taken for death when my poor wife died!"

"What thoughts had you of God?"

"I didn't think about him much ; but when I did, I thought he was a great mighty Being, who never cared nothing at all about what we said or did."

"Had you any idea of your soul, or its living for ever?"

"Why, sir, I was always puzzled about it. Sometimes I thought that very wicked people went to hell when they died, especially the rich."

"Had you never any fears about going to hell?"

"No, never. My common thoughts were, that when I died there would be an end of me ; just the same as with the sheep or the horse."

"You believe there is a change in you now, and one for the better?"

"Oh yes, the Lord be praised ! I know'd there was a change in me when I spoke to you after I heard that blessed sermon ; but I know it better now. I now find it lasts with me ; but then I fear'd it would'nt. If I had known fifty years agone what I know now, it would have been a good thing for me. I should have been all that long time a power happier in my soul. I wish my poor wife had lived to see this day."

"To whom do you ascribe the great change that has been produced in you?"

"Yes, it is a great change, like changing a flint stone into bread, or a bog into a garden. The Bible calls it, being called out of darkness into marvellous light. This is a true account of it. Darkness, I take, means ignorance ; and light, I take, means knowledge. I have come from

one to the other, and nobody can make me think otherwise. Why, if a blind man sees the sun, he must know that his eyes be opened."

"Very true; but who produced the change which you say you have felt?"

"At first I thought it was you, because I felt it when you were preaching. But now I know better. Now I know that it is the Lord that gives light to the understanding, and love in the heart. And, praised be his name, I can now say what Paul said, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'"

"You have felt a great change, but do you feel perfect? or do you feel that your heart is still wicked?"

"O sir! there is a power of sin in my heart. The fallow is ploughed up, but it is not cleared yet. And this puzzles me. I pray the Lord to make me holy, but he hasn't done it yet. But I had great comfort when Master Dean read to me the seventh chapter of the Romans. I thought when he was reading, that the writer of that chapter felt that he had a wicked heart, as I often feel that I have one."

"I suppose you believe that He who has begun the good work in you will carry it on, and bring it to perfection."

"Yes, if you mind, sir, you proved that, when you preached a sermon t'other sabbath from the gladsome words of Paul. I have remembered them ever since. 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ,' Phil. i. 6."

"Do you recollect anything whith I said to show that we ought to expect that the Author of the good work of grace will complete it?"

"Yes, sir; you said that a wise builder, when he has put in the foundation, and carried up the house a story or two, will not leave off, and let it tumble to ruins, when he wants to use it. No; he'll go on till he has finished it. And so I hope the Lord will finish the good work he has begun in my soul. It is wonderful. I sometimes think about it till I get puzzled how God can be so good to such a sinner. But my heart gets warm to him, and then all is right again."

"I suppose you sometimes long to have the good work brought to perfection?"

"Now, sir, on this point I'm a bit disappointed. I thought

at first, when I felt the change, that I should soon get free from sin. But now I find, from the Bible, and from Master Dean's talking to me, that I shan't get quite free from sin till I get to a better world. The sermon you preached last Sunday morning brought a power of comfort to my soul ; I put the text on my heart, and don't think it will e'er get off—' We shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is.' How wonderful ! To see Jesus Christ in his glory, and to be like him ! I should like that hour to come."

I was much gratified with this interview, and at finding how rapid a progress he had made in learning to read. At the age of seventy-two he could not tell a letter, but now he could make out, with a little help, several chapters in John's Gospel, and some other parts of the Bible. The 23rd and 103rd Psalms greatly delighted him. In addition to the regular time he devoted to his studies, every Monday morning he went to the cottage, and got his friend, John Dean, to help him to read the texts of the preceding sabbath ; and he learned several by heart, and was soon able to repeat many verses, and relate the leading particulars of some of the more striking and interesting narratives of the Bible.

He came to me one evening, and said, "I can't, sir, do much to serve Jesus Christ and his cause, as I'm old and poor ; but I should like to do what I can, as the woman did you told us about on Sunday. I'm thinking I could get rid of some tracts among the boatmen that come to my son's tap-room. And perhaps the Lord may bless the reading of them to the conversion of some poor sinner, as old, and as ignorant as I was once. If he should, I shall have a power of heart-gladness."

Some tracts were given to him. In addition to his labour of distributing them, he became a visitor of the sick ; and, from the devotion of his spirit, and the humble simplicity of his manners, he was always welcome in the chamber of affliction and death. On one occasion, when calling to see a person who was dangerously ill, I found the old ploughman was with him, and stepping up the stairs very cautiously, I had the satisfaction of hearing him in prayer. I could not catch every sentence of his prayer, but I heard the following confessions and petitions :

" O Lord, by nature we be poor, and wicked, and ig-

norant sinners. O Lord, we don't know ourselves. We don't know thee. We don't know Jesus Christ.

“O Lord, we were once under a sentence of death, but we didn't know it. Pardon all our wickedness, and all our sins, for Christ's sake.”

“O blessed Jesus, we thank thee for living for us. We thank thee for dying for us. We thank thee for living again for us. We come to thee for rest of soul; and we come to thee for eternal life.”

“O blessed Jesus, look upon our dying brother. Comfort his heart. Keep away the great enemy. Come and meet him on his way to thy kingdom. May he soon see thee, and be like thee.”

“O Lord, save me, a poor old sinner, who lived for three-score years and ten, and didn't love thee nor pray to thee. Make me fit for thy kingdom, and take me there when I go out of this world of sin and sorrow.”

“O blessed Jesus, we bless thee for going to get a place ready for us, that we may have a good home when we are taken out of this world of sin and sorrow.”

After pursuing the noiseless tenor of his way for about the space of five years, growing in knowledge and in grace, and walking in the great, and good, and lovely principles of the Christian faith, and highly esteemed by those Christians who knew him, his natural strength began to decline, and other symptoms indicated the approach of his latter end. I visited him during his confinement, and was much pleased by finding him patient and resigned, looking forward, with subdued eagerness, to his entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

I once asked him, “Are you suffering much?”

“Yes, sir, my sufferings be great, but not so great as the sufferings which my dear Saviour bore for me. When he was suffering for me he was forsaken, but the Lord does not forsake me. He was on a cross, but I be on a good bed. He was mocked when dying by the wicked, but all speak kindly to me.”

“You are not afraid to die?”

“Why should I be? I got upon my heart yesterday this blessed verse, ‘Because I live, ye shall live also.’ Oh, I long to see my dear Saviour, and be like him, and with him for ever!”

“Then you have no doubt of going to him?”

“ Why should I, when Jesus Christ says, ‘ Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out?’ ”

“ Then you consider his kingdom as your future home?”

“ Yes, sir, I do, and I believe my dear Saviour is waiting to receive me. This comforts my heart.”

He was confined to his room during the whole of the winter. In the spring he rallied, and recovered his usual flow of spirits; and as the summer advanced, he again attended public worship, which he called “ the gate of heaven to his soul.” The last time I saw him was when administering the Lord’s supper; his countenance showed that he felt much, and after taking the cup his tears could be seen. My eye followed him as he walked down the aisle with his friend John Dean; and had I then known that I should see his face no more, I would have stepped after him, and bid him farewell: I would have offered him my congratulations on his coming joy. In the course of the following week, I abruptly heard of his death, which deeply affected me. On inquiry, I found he died suddenly and alone, being found dead by his relatives when they arose in the morning.

“ I didn’t suppose,” said John Dean, “ that he would leave us so suddenly, though we have thought lately that he would not stay with us much longer, his common conversation was so much about Christ and heavenly things. When looking on a field of wheat we had both seen the week before, he said, in allusion to a remark he heard from the pulpit on the preceding sabbath, ‘ If we did but get ripe for heaven as fast as this bit of wheat has ripened for the reapers since a week agone, we should very soon be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.’ Having got on this subject, which for some weeks he had been fond of speaking about, he exclaimed, with quite an animated voice and look, ‘ Oh what a wonderful world heaven must be! how I long to get there! How I long to see my blessed Saviour, and be like him! Oh how I long to bow down on my knees to worship him! how I long to sing his praises! What grand music there! What a power of voices to sing his honour and glory! and they will sing for ever! Oh, if I had never left the country to live here, I should never have know’d nothing about these grand and glorious things! What a mercy! the Lord be praised!’ ”

“ His conversation, sir,” said Mrs. Dean, as I was rising to leave the cottage, “ certainly showed the power of the

Lord Jesus over a stupid mind and a stubborn heart, and the exceeding riches of his grace in the salvation of the chief of sinners. A joyous day it was, sir, for the angels when he heard the first sermon."

With what rapidity did George Medway pass through a series of wonderful changes within the space of a few years! At the age of seventy-two he had never looked into a Bible, knew not a letter of the alphabet, and was apparently ignorant of the facts of the Christian revelation, consenting to be led to a place of worship with no other expectation than merely to enjoy a nap; and yet when there, his attention is riveted to the words of the preacher, he hears the truth and understands it, feels a renovating power, and shortly comes forth before the eye of the world a new creature in Christ Jesus. In his case there was no long training, no long continued efforts to enlighten his dark mind; his spirit was made free, and at once he saw the Saviour and believed in him, as clearly as though he had long been taught—and felt his obligation to obey the laws of Jesus Christ. This did not turn out to be a day-dream—a passing fancy—but a positive reality, leading to great improvement of mind, and a life practically devoted to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The sceptic, who has never fairly examined the Christian religion, may look on such a fact as this with indifference, and might imagine the cause of it was the power of enthusiastic fanaticism; but no wise man will feel satisfied till he has found something like a sufficient cause of its existence. To suppose that the old man himself effected the great change which took place in his mind and in his character, would be absurd. And it would be equally absurd to refer it to the mere agency which was employed in its production, because there were wanting both the intellectual capacity and moral sensibility for that agency to act on. To what other cause can it be referable, but to the intervention of a Divine power, rendering the preaching of the gospel effectual to the recovery of the fallen spirit of this old man from the dominion of ignorance and of sin, preparatory to his final salvation?

It is in reference to such a case as this that Foster says:—“ We cannot close this subject without adverting to a phenomenon as admirable as, unhappily, it is rare, and for which the observers may, if they choose, go round the whole circle

of their philosophy, and begin again to find any adequate cause other than the most immediate agency of the Almighty Spirit. Here and there an instance occurs, to the delight of the Christian philanthropist, of a person brought up in utter ignorance and barbarian rudeness, and so continuing till late, sometimes very late in life; and then at last, after such a length of time and habit has completed its petrifying effect, suddenly seized upon by a mysterious power, and taken with an irresistible force out of the dark hold in which the spirit has lain imprisoned and torpid, into the sphere of thought and feeling.

“Occasion is taken of adverting to such facts, not so much for the purpose of magnifying the nature, as simply exhibiting the effect, of an influence that can breathe with such power on the obtuse intellectual faculties, which it appears, in the most signal of these instances, almost to create anew. We have known instances in which the change, the intellectual change, has been so conspicuous within a brief space of time, that even an infidel observer must have forfeited all claim to be esteemed a man of sense, if he would not acknowledge—‘This that you call Divine grace, whatever it may really be, is the strangest awakener of the faculties after all.’ And, to a devout man, it is a spectacle of most enchanting beauty, thus to see the immortal plant, which has been under a malignant blast while sixty or seventy years have passed over it, coming out at length in the bloom of life.”

Should any unhappy sinner, weary and heavy-laden with the burden of his guilt, read this story of George Medway, may the desire be given him to seek mercy, and may he too enter that new world in which alone is life and peace—the knowledge of himself as a lost sinner, and the knowledge and love of Christ as his Saviour full of power and of love! And may he be brought to feel and pray as Medway did, “O BLESSED JESUS, I THANK THEE FOR LIVING FOR ME. I THANK THEE FOR DYING FOR ME. I THANK THEE FOR LIVING AGAIN FOR ME. I COME TO THEE FOR REST OF SOUL FOR PARDON OF SIN. I COME TO THEE FOR ETERNAL LIFE.”